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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3817
INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BUENOS AIRES 9715

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, AR
SUBJECT: DISAPPEARANCE OF MOTHERS GROUP'S SUPPORTERS: LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

REF: BUENOS AIRES 9420 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: OVER THE WEEKEND ARGENTINE AUTHORITIES (GOA) MADE TWO DRAMATIC ANNOUNCEMENTS REGARDING THE DEC. 8-10 DISAPPEARANCES OF 13 PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO. ON FRIDAY NIGHT (12/16) THE GOVERNMENT'S INFORMATION OFFICE ISSUED A CAREFULLY WORDED COMMUNIQUE REPUDIATING ANY GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT AND BLAMING SUBVERSIVE NIHILISM FOR THE DISAPPEARANCES. THE FOLLOWING NIGHT (12/17) THE FIRST ARMY COMMAND ISSUED A BULLETIN ANNOUNCING THAT THE MONTONERO ORGANIZATION HAD CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE KIDNAPPING OF THE TWO FRENCH NUNS AND HAD MADE FOUR
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DEMANDS, INCLUDING THE FREEING OF 21 POLITICAL PRISONERS,

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY [signature] DATE 4/20/82
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

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FOR THEIR RELEASE. THE MONTONERO PLOY IS, HOWEVER, WIDELY DISBELIEVED, AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF SOME OF THE DISAPPEARED PERSONS CALLED ON THE FRENCH AND AMERICAN EMBASSIES ON MONDAY (12/19) TO REGISTER THIS DOUBT AND URGE THAT DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE BE BROUGHT AGAINST GOA TO FORCE IT TO PRODUCE THE PERSONS ABDUCTED. WE ARE USING ALL EMBASSY RESOURCES TO TRY TO SORT OUT WHAT MAY ACTUALLY HAVE HAPPENED TO THE PERSONS ABDUCTED. ELEMENTS OF THE GOVERNMENT CONTACTED CONTINUE TO PROFESS MYSTIFICATION AND AT THE SAME TIME PRIVATELY TO DERIDE THE "MONTONERO PLOY". END SUMMARY

1. THE GOVERNMENT OF ARGENTINA BROKE ITS OFFICIAL SILENCE REGARDING THE DISAPPEARANCES OF AT LEAST 13 MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS OF THE "MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO", AFTER A WEEK OF CONSIDERABLE DIPLOMATIC AND PRESS INTEREST, BY ISSUING AN INTRICATELY WORDED COMMUNIQUE LATE DECEMBER 17. THE PRESIDENCY'S COMMUNIQUE OBLIQUELY MADE THREE POINTS-- THE GOVERNMENT WAS NOT INVOLVED IN THE DISAPPEARANCES; "NIHILISTIC SUBVERSION" WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THESE ACTIONS; AND LASTLY, THE GOVERNMENT REJECTED THIS ATTEMPT TO CAUSE CONFRONTATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES, THE CHURCH, AND FAMILIES CAUGHT UP IN EXTREMIST VIOLENCE. THE GOVERNMENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT DID NOT ANSWER QUESTIONS REGARDING CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DISAPPEARANCES OR DISPEL THE STRONG NEGATIVE REACTIONS IN FRANCE TO THE DISAPPEARANPD OF TWO NUNS FROM A TOULOUSE ORDER.

2. THE FOLLOWING NIGHT (12/17) IN AN UNUSUAL COMMUNIQUE THE FIRST ARMY COMMAND ANNOUNCED THAT THE AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE HAD RECEIVED A COMMUNICATION EARLIER THAT DAY FROM THE MONTONERO ORGANIZATION CLAIMING CREDIT FOR THE

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KIDNAPPING OF THE TWO FRENCH NUNS, SISTER ALICIA AND SISTER LEONIE. ACCORDING TO THE ARMY COMMUNIQUE THE "MONTONERO" DOCUMENT DEMANDED:

A. THAT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ISSUE A DOCUMENT REPUDIATING THE PRESENT ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT;

B. THAT THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT ISSUE A DOCUMENT REPUDIATING THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT AND GRANT ASYLUM TO ARGENTINE POLITICAL PRISONERS;

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C. THAT THE MILITARY JUNTA SUBMIT A PUBLIC REPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS REGARDING THE STATUS OF DETAINED AND DISAPPEARED PERSONS IN ARGENTINA;

D. AND, THAT 21 "PERSONAL SUBVERSIVES" (SEE LIST BELOW) BE RELEASED. THE JOINT COMMUNIQUE THEN WENT TO DESCRIBE PARTS OF THE MEETING BETWEEN THE HOLY SEE'S PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE ANNOUNCEMENT. THE COMMUNIQUE WAS GIVEN WIDE PLAY IN THE ARGENTINE PRESS WITH NO COMMENT.

3. THE FRENCH PRESS AGENCY IN FACT DID RECEIVE THREE DOCUMENTS IN THEIR MORNING MAIL ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17--THE "MONTONERO" LETTER, A HANDWRITTEN LETTER IN FRENCH FROM SISTER ALICIA AND A 6 X 9 GLOSSY PHOTOGRAPH OF THE TWO FRENCH CATHOLIC NUNS SEATED BELOW A MONTONERO FLAG HOLDING A COPY OF THE DECEMBER 14 EDITION OF "LA NACION". THE "MONTONERO" LETTER STATED THAT ON DECEMBER 8 AND 10 THE COMBAT CELLS OF THE MONTONEROS HAD DETAINED THE TWO FRENCH NUNS. (NO MENTION WAS MADE OF THE OTHER 11 DISAPPEARED PERSONS.) IT ADDED THAT THEIR DETENTION HAD TAKEN PLACE IN ORDER TO OBTAIN CERTAIN COMMITMENTS FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF FRANCE, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, AND THE ARGENTINE MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND TO BE MADE BEFORE DECEMBER 24 THE FOLLOWING PERSONS:

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EX-PRESIDENT HECTOR J. CAMPORA
JOURNALIST RODOLFO WALSH
EX-GOVERNOR OF STA. CRUZ "SR. COSENTINI"
EX-GOVERNOR OF MENDOZA SR. MARTINEZ BACA
EX-MINISTER OF EDUCATION DOCTOR TAIANA
EX-RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BUENOS AIRES
LICENCIADO ERNESTO [illegible]
EX-SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF STATE WORKERS OF [illegible] SR. OSCAR AGUIRRO
SECRETARY GENERAL OF [illegible] UNION
SR. BRAVO
STUDENT LEADER DANTE [illegible]
JOURNALIST EMILIANO [illegible]

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AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 BUENOS AIRES 9715

SCRIPT WRITER GERMAN O' ESTERHELD
PERONIST FEMININE LEADER DIANA ALSO
METAL WORKERS' UNION LEADER LORENZO MIGUEL
ALBERTO PICCININI
SERGIO TOMASSELLA
CURINA FORTUNATO
ALFREDO TEOFILO OLIVO
JUAN CARLOS PAROLINI
EDUARDO DE AYALA
GLORIA AYALA
NANCY AYALA

4. IN RESPONSE TO THE ARMY'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MONTONERO LETTER, THREE RELATIVES OF THE DISAPPEARED MEMBERS OF THE MOTHERS GROUP CALLED AT THE AMERICAN EMBASSY ON MONDAY (12/19) TO URGE THE US GOVERNMENT TO CONTINUE ITS PRESSURE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT OF ARGENTINA TO RELEASE THEIR RELATIVES. THEY CLAIMED THAT INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE FROM THE US AND FRANCE WAS THE ONLY HOPE FOR THEIR RELATIVES'
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RELEASE. THEY CHARACTERIZED THE MONTONERO DOCUMENT AS BEING A FABRICATION. THE FAMILY MEMBERS ARGUED THAT ALL

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THE EVENTS BEAR THE CLEAR HALLMARK OF A SECURITY FORCE OPERATION. THE TEN PERSONS TAKEN AT THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY CROSS ON DECEMBER 8 WERE ABDUCTED BY SIX CARLOADS OF ARMED MEN DRESSED IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES. STARTING LATER THAT SAME NIGHT MEN IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES AS POLICE OFFICERS SEARCHED FIVE OF THE ABDUCTED PERSONS' AND THEIR RELATIVES' HOMES IN WHAT WERE TERMED ROUTINE POLICE SEARCHES. IN THE CASE OF HORACIO ANIBAL ELBERT, HIS MOTHER'S, HIS FATHER'S AND HIS AUNT'S HOMES WERE SEARCHED BY FIVE SELF PROCLAIMED POLICEMEN WHO ACTUALLY CONDUCTED THE INVESTIGATION WHILE FIVE OTHERS GUARDED THE BUILDINGS ENTRANCES. THE FAMILY MEMBERS ALSO STATED THAT ONE OF THE DETAINEES MANAGED TO SEND A MESSAGE TO HIS FAMILY THROUGH A FREED PRISONER THAT HE WAS BEING HELD IN THE FEDERAL POLICE HEADQUARTERS. FAMILY MEMBERS ARE ALSO CONCERNED THAT IN THE "MONTONERO" DOCUMENT ONLY THE TWO FRENCH NUNS WERE MENTIONED WITH NO DISCUSSION OF THE OTHERS TAKEN.

5. WE HAVE DEPLOYED EMBASSY RESOURCES AS BEST WE COULD TO TRY AND GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS MURKY BUSINESS. NOT SURPRISINGLY EVEN OUR CONTACTS WITHIN GOVERNMENT PRIVATELY DISCOUNT THE "MONTONERO PLOY." (COMMENT: A MONTONERO SPOKESMAN IN PARIS, ACCORDING TO ONE REPORT, AND ONE IM MEXICO CITY AS WELL HAS DISCLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE NUNS'S ABDUCTIONS. THIS DENIAL HAS NOT BEEN PRINTED HERE AND WE DO NOT EXPECT IT WILL.) ONE VERY INFORMAL SOURCE ATTRIBUTED THE ABDUCTIONS TO THE STATE SECRETARIAT FOR INTELLIGENCY ("SIDE"), ADDING THAT THEY RESULTED FROM THE DECISION OF A LOW RANKING OFFICER. OTHER SOURCES SIMPLY

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PROFESS MYSTIFICATION--BUT AT THE SAME TIME DO NOT EXPRESS DOUBT THAT THE ABDUCTIONS WERE AUTHORED BY SOME--UNNAMED--BRANCH OF THE GOVERNMENT'S SECURITY SERVICES.

6. FRENCH EMBASSY OFFICIALS HERE ARE DISMAYED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S AND "MONTONERO" STATEMENTS. THEY HAD BEEN CONFIDENT, UNTIL THE WEEKEND ANNOUNCEMENTS, THAT STRONG DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIONS BOTH HERE AND IN PARIS, PLUS THE SHARP PROTESTS OF THE FRENCH PRESS WOULD RESULT IN THE RELEASE OF THE TWO FRENCH NUNS. THE FIRST ARMY'S RAPID ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE "UNBELIEVABLE MONTONERO LETTER"

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(TO QUOTE A FRENCH EMBASSY OFFICIAL) RAISES FEAR THAT THE "MONTONERO PLOY" IS BUT A DEVICE TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM BY PLACING THE BLAME ON A THIRD PARTY. EMBASSY OFFICIALS DOUBT THAT THE MATTER WILL BE RESOLVED SO EASILY, AND EXPECT FRENCH DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE TO CONTINUE.

7. TWO FRENCH VISITORS ARE CURRENTLY IN BUENOS AIRES. THE PREVIOUSLY PLANNED VISIT TO THE FRENCH MISSIONARY COMMUNITY IN ARGENTINA OF FRENCH BISHOP BERNARD STARTED LAST WEEK. ALTHOUGH THE FRENCH BISHOP HAS STATED THAT HIS VISIT WAS NOT A RESPONSE TO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE TWO FRENCH NUNS, HE HAS USED THE OCCASION TO MEET WITH THE PERMANENT COMMISSION OF THE ARGENTINE BISHOPRIC TO DISCUSS THE NUNS' DISAPPEARANCES. A MR. GADOT, PRINCIPAL ASSISTANT TO EDGARD FAURE, GAULLIST DEPUTY FROM DOUBS, ARRIVED FROM PARIS ON DECEMBER 19 SPECIFICALLY TO PRESSURE THE GOA INTO EFFECTING THE RELEASE OF THE TWO TOULOUSE NUNS.

8. THE FRENCH EMBASSY IS FURTHER DISTRUBED AT THE LACK OF RESPONSIVENESS FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. FOR EXAMPLE, OVER A WEEK AGO THEY PROVIDED THE LICENSE PLATE NUMBER OF A CAR REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN USED IN THE HOLY CROSS CHURCH ABDUCTIONS, BUT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS REFUSED *TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE FURTHER.*
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9. IN TALKS WITH PEOPLE CONNECTED IN SOME WAY WITH PERSONS ABDUCTED WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO COME UP WITH THE FOLLOWING CHRONOLOGY DESCRIBING AT LEAST SOME OF THE RELATED EVENTS:

DECEMBER 8

1600 - MOTHER MET IN PLAZA DE MAYO

200 - REMO BERARDO AND ANOTHER UNIDENTIFIED PERSON TAKEN FROM BERARDO'S ARTIST STUDIO IN LA BOCA AREA

2100 - APPROXIMATELY 10 PEOPLE, INCLUDING SISTER ALICIA, TAKEN FROM VESTIBULE OF THE HOLY CROSS CHURCH IN BUENOS AIRES. A SHEET WITH "MANY"

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SIGNATURES AND 140,000 PESOS (US$250) FOR THE MOTHERS' ADVERTISEMENT PETITIONING THE GOVERNMENT WERE TAKEN. THE PERSON WHO WAS ACTUALLY HOLDING THE MONEY WAS ROUGHTED UP AT THE CHURCH AND ASKED SEVERAL TIMES WHERE THE REST OF THE MONEY WAS BEING HELD. 30,000 PESOS BELONGING TO HIM WAS ALSO TAKEN, BUT HE WAS NOT ABDUCTED.

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AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 BUENOS AIRES 9715

DECEMBER 9

0010 - FIVE ARMED MEN CONDUCTED A "ROUTINE POLICE SEARCH" OF THE APARTMENT OF HORACIO ANIBAL ELBERT'S FATHER-IN-LAW. ELBERT HAD BEEN TAKEN THREE HOURS EARLIER AT THE HOLY CROSS CHURCH. ANOTHER FIVE ARMED MEN GUARDED THE FRONT ENTRANCE OF APARTMENT HOUSE.

0215 - HORACIO ANIBAL ELBERT'S PARENTS HOUSE SEARCHED BY PERSONS IDENTIFYING THEMSELVES AS POLICE.

0830 - SENORA ASUZANA DE VICENTE, FOUNDER OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO MOTHERS' GROUP WAS FORCEABLY ABDUCTED NEAR HER HOME WHILE SHOPPING.

MORNING - POLICE SEARCHED APARTMENT OF MOTHERS' GROUP MEMBER KNOWN AS SENORA [illegible]. SHE WAS NOT AT HOME AND NO ONE DETAINED.
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1530 - HORACIO ANIBAL ELBERT'S AUNT'S APARTMENT

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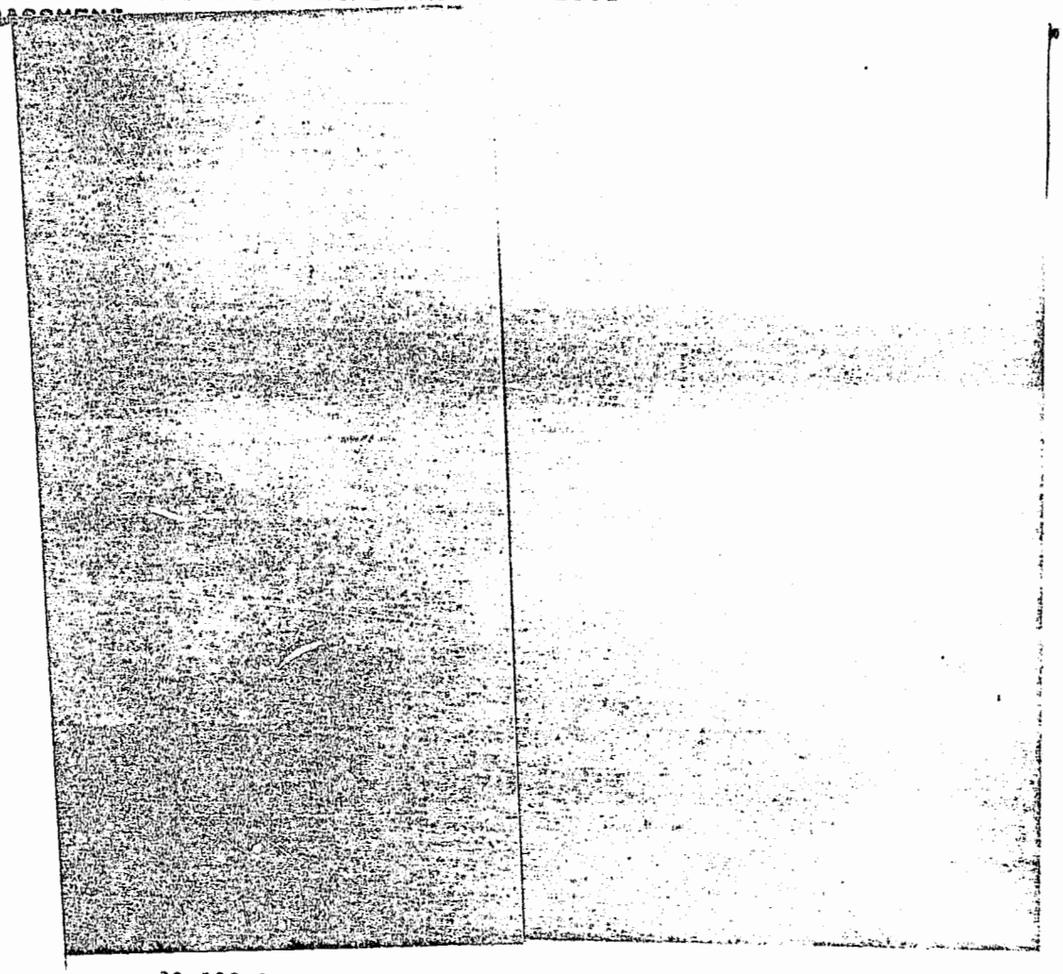
SEARCHED BY "POLICE OFFICIALS."

DECEMBER 10

MORNING - SISTER LEONIE ABDUCTED FROM HER HOME. LA NACION CARRIED MOTHERS' ADVERTISEMENT ASKING GOVERNMENT FOR INFORMATION WHETHER THEIR CHILDREN ARE DEAD OR ALIVE, SIGNED BY 834 WOMEN.

DECEMBER 15

2-4 PM - MOTHERS' GROUP MET IN THE PLAZA DE MAYO. A PLANNED "MASSIVE" PRECHRISTMAS DEMONSTRATION, WITH MOTHERS COMING FROM ALL OVER ARGENTINA *TO PARTICIPATE, TURNED INTO A REGULAR SIZED* THURSDAY GATHERING. THERE WAS NO POLICE HARASSMENT



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